

High school equivalency examinations
(HB 2037 by Edge/Zaffirini)

DIGEST: HB 2037 would have removed a restriction in current law that allows only those over the age of 17 who do not have a high school diploma to take a high school equivalency examination.

GOVERNOR'S
REASON
FOR VETO:

This bill might unintentionally encourage some students younger than 17 to drop out of school and take the high school equivalency examination. This is not in line with the efforts of the Texas Education Agency and local school districts to keep young people in school and conflicts with new legislation requiring school attendance until age 17.

RESPONSE:

A spokesman for Sen. Judith Zaffirini, the Senate sponsor of SB 2037, said the bill as drafted did not conflict with the intention of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) since TEA had asked for the bill to be drafted. The bill had addressed the concerns that it might unintentionally cause students to drop-out by directing the State Board of Education by rule to discourage potential dropouts arising from the bill. The spokesman added that the bill when passed did not conflict with any legislation until changes were made in the Texas Education Agency sunset legislation regarding school attendance.

NOTES:

HB 2037 passed the House on the Consent Calendar and was not analyzed in a Daily Floor Report.

SB 417 by Green, the Texas Education Agency sunset bill, changed existing law to allow 16-year-olds to take the equivalency exam if a public agency that is supervising or has custody of them recommends that they take the equivalency exam. Otherwise, the minimum age for the test remains 17. (HB 2335 by Hightower, the omnibus criminal justice bill, also includes this provision.)

SB 417 also directs TEA to develop a pilot program to prepare students at risk of dropping out of school to take the high school equivalency exam. Districts with dropout rates in the top 25 percent in the state would be required to participate. To participate in the pilot program, students would have to be 16 or older.